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and after the great war

Budapest

1919

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HUNGARY BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE GREAT WAR

BY

JULIUS ALTENBURGER

CORRESPONDING MEMBER
OF THE INSTITUTE OF ACTUARIES.

HUNGARIAN TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY LEAGUE
BUDAPEST, 1919.

HUNGARY BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE GREAT WAR.

The satisfaction of the demands made upon Hungary by the neighbouring peoples, constitutes one of the many problems to be solved at the Peace Conference. It lies not only in the interest of Hungary, but in that of the whole civilized world, that Hungary retains its territory untouched and has an open way to the sea, with the control of its old sea-port Fiume. In view of the fact that the enemies of Hungary are putting forth their utmost efforts to convince the Great Powers of the West of their pretended rights, it is here of supreme importance to give an explanation in accordance with the facts, if it be only a brief sketch, and this is all the more necessary, since it is those Powers against whom we were obliged to fight, who are now to decide the fate of Hungary. It is, or should be, impossible, for the fate of Hungary to be decided by hate and enmity, but rather in harmony with the general peace of the nations. For this reason, it is essential for one to form a perfectly clear idea as to the part really played by Hungary in the Great War.

I. HUNGARY AND THE GREAT WAR.

It is not to be doubted, and a truthful description of the events compels one to confirm the fact, that Hungary, or at least the overwhelming majority of the Hungarian people went into the war with the consciousness of a just cause. Hungary never wanted the war. Hungary was peaceful to that extent, that it had always lived at peace even with those peoples who had always done their utmost to prevent its economic, cultural, and political development. In the first place one has only to consider our unsavoury relation to Austria, and nothing reflects the Hungarian character better than the fact, that the Hungarian people always kept every agreement made with the Habsburg dynasty and Austrian State, honourably, although the other party always arranged these agreements to the disadvantage of Hungary. Since a number of years Hungary could not but see that the Serbs were at work to bring about the downfall of the Danube Monarchy: though certainly in consequence of the annexation of Bosnia. It was a generally known fact that the Serbs were backed by Russia in their aspirations. Especially after the second Balkan War they seem to have thought the time had come to fulfil their imperialistic ambitions, i. e. to form a Great Serbia which should comprise, besides the limited territory of Serbia itself plus Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia, Dalmatia, part of Albania, and the South Slav territory of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Here Hungary once more furnished a proof

of its unshaken fidelity in that it considered itself obliged, in honour, to avenge the Serajevo murders, although an aspirant to the throne, from whom the country in general expected nothing good, was removed by this outrage. Then, when it transpired that Russia had incited the whole Servian conspiracy with a view to absorbing the entire Slav territory of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Hungary took up arms against Russia also with enthusiasm. The Hungarians could not forget that the struggle for liberty which they had carried on against Austria and the Habsburg Dynasty, in 1848/49, had been suppressed by Russia and the country then given over to the vindictive absolutism of the Austrians. And when, some months after the outbreak of war, our Italian ally broke faith with us, Hungary saw nothing but the breach of faith, and although its own interests were not threatened by Italy, although it was only for the defence of the dynasty and Austria, sacrificed hundreds of thousands of its sons on the Italian front, for no other reason than because it felt the obligation of its freely accepted agreements.

The sacrifices demanded of Hungary were not at an end with this. The Habsburg dynasty never missed an opportunity of playing off foreign peoples against Hungary and in the years 1848/49, not only the Croats, but also the Roumans of Transylvania fought against us in the interests of the dynasty. In spite of the atrocities practised by the Roumans in these years, the thought of retribution was not entertained in Hungary, and it is hardly to be wondered at or

considered a sin, that just and righteous anger flamed up in the whole people, when our allied and neighbouring power Rumania broke into Transylvania in August 1916, and brought all the horrors of an unjust war upon that unhappy part of our country:

In all this, there is nothing in the least against the Western Powers, for whom the educated people of our own country have always entertained a warm regard. But that beside this most Hungarian circles showed their faithful allegiance to Germany during the course of the war, in excess of the loyalty demanded of allies, can also not be wondered at by any right-thinking man, since Hungary had much for which to be grateful to the German military power in the course of the war. The peaceable character of the Hungarians is demonstrated by the fact that militarism was felt to be a crushing burden by the whole people, and that the sons of but few Hungarian families are devoted to a military career. This is certainly to be ascribed to the fact that the traditional Austrian spirit, hostile to Hungary, lurked in the army of the Monarchy, and that not only was every Hungarian tendency suppressed there, but also every one was persecuted who wished to assert his Hungarian character. The brilliant military qualities of the Hungarian people could therefore obtain absolutely no recognition in the Austro-Hungarian army, the direction of the army was quite incapable, and the country would have become the prey of its enemies, in spite of the heroism and gallantry of the Hungarian soldiers, had not the German army

leaders taken over the control of affairs, and, with the help of our forces, overcome the Serbs, the Russians, and the Rumanians. At the same time the regard felt for the Germans has never been carried so far as to admit of Hungary blindly lending itself to be the tool of any German imperialistic efforts. The conception of „Middle-Europe“ was not only not welcome in Hungary, but it can be said that the vast majority of its people simply do not understand the question. The idea of „Middle-Europe“ gained ground in the circles alone which were not inspired by national feeling and were only concerned with the prosperity of their own commercial interests within the bounds of a Middle-European Union of States.

II. HUNGARY AND THE NATIONALITIES.

For one to form a correct judgement of the question of the nationalities in Hungary, it is here essential to assert that all the races living in the land have immigrated with the consent of the Hungarians themselves, and this since the time of the „Migration of the Peoples“, when the latter took possession of the country. All statements intended to prove that any one of the nationalities now living in Hungary is descended from peoples subjected when the country was conquered, are incorrect, and not in agreement with the historical facts. It is quite correct that a Slav people lived in Upper Hungary in those times, but this people not only made peace

and became friendly with the Hungarian conquerors, by were completely absorbed by the Hungarian nation by intermarriage. The Slovaks living in Upper Hungary to-day are immigrants of a much later period, and the same is the case with the Roumans who have slowly come into Transylvania in the course of centuries, owing to the pressure of the Turks and of the Slav peoples dwelling in the Balkans. On the other hand, Serbs were settled in the South Hungarian counties by the Habsburgs, to serve as a prop for the dynasty in the face of the unsleeping Hungarian effort for liberation. These historical facts remain unshaken, in spite of the attempts of the neighbouring peoples to falsify history. The greatest mistake committed by the Hungarians was that, inspired by far too much chivalry and generosity towards their guests, they did nothing to prevent the latter from gaining a firm foothold in the country and spreading farther and farther as long as they showed no actual hostility towards the land. The hostile tendencies did not develop among the masses of the nationalities, but were always started by outside agitators, who systematically made every effort to create economic and cultural connections, apart from those of mere blood-relationship, with the neighbouring peoples. In Upper-Hungary Czech, and in Transylvania, Rumanian banks, did their utmost to alienate the nationalities from the Hungarians.

The assertion in the accusations against Hungary with which the Western Powers have been overwhelmed to the end of nationalist propaganda, — that

Hungary prevented the free development of the nationalities, is almost entirely a pure invention.

It is certainly a fact that Hungary could do but little for the economic and cultural uplifting of the nationalities, since it had far too much to do in regard to its own sufferings. It is also a fact that in Hungary the official language is Hungarian, besides which, however, the nationalities are able to use their own mother-tongue in official capacities. It may also have occurred that some minions of the authorities have been guilty of misusing their official power in dealing with the nationalities. But in general the fact remains that a good understanding existed between the Hungarians and the nationalities, which has only been disturbed by a contra-Hungarian agitation, without the great mass of the peoples of alien origin ever being hostile in sentiment. Only one exception to this can be cited, in the years 1848/49, when the alien peoples were systematically and by every possible means incited against Hungary.

The speech delivered by one of the leanders of the Hungary's Rouman subjects in the Hungarian Parliament in the year 1916, proves that this corresponds with the facts. In it, he expressly declares that several millions of Roumans live in this country in fraternity with the Hungarians, also the innumerable family connections between Hungarians and non-Hungarians, has always promoted the fullest understanding between the people. There can be absolutely no question of breaking up this thousand year old realm and incorporating large

parts of it with other states. That would be an injustice least of all deserved by that people who for centuries have formed a wall and barrier for the civilized peoples of Europe against the Turks.

III. CAUSES OF OUR APATHY AND OUR AWAKENING.

That the development of Hungary has been very backward was until recently an indisputable fact due to its being for centuries the victim of the Turkish wars. Nothing is more characteristic of the deceit of our enemies than the attempt to deny the Hungarian nation even this heavy sacrifice and to represent the Serbs as the saviours of Europa from the Osman flood. On the other hand, we can console ourselves by referring to Michelet, one of the greatest of French historians who acknowledged the undeniable services of Hungary to such an extent that he demanded: "Quand donc payerons nous notre dette à ce peuple béni, sauveur de l'Occident?" (When shall we settle our debt with this blessed people, the saviours of the West?)

It is not my intention here to sketch the history of the 400 years which stretch between the beginning of the Turkish wars and the last Hungarian struggle for liberty against Austria. It is generally known that these four centuries were, for us, full of the greatest difficulties, since Hungary was for the most part compelled to battle with two enemies, against the Turks on the one hand, and against

Austria and the Habsburg dynasty on the other. The utter need into which Hungary fell in the year 1526, when after the ill-fated battle of Mohács, the Turks overran the country, caused its hard-pressed people to accept the protection offered by the than powerful House of Habsburg, and with this then began a four hundred years long tale of suffering. Is it a wonder that our people were tired of struggling, is it a wonder that they sank into the greatest apathy, when their magnificent effort was crushed by the superior numbers of the Russians seventy years ago and the best of their sons fell victims to the executioner? And the nation has always shown itself to be generous and has always forgiven the sins of the House of Habsburg. — It conceded this dynasty the heritage of the Hungarian throne, after its capital was reconquered from the Turks with the assistance of the Austrian army. It made the connection with Austria and the dynasty still closer and in spite of the cruelties of 1848/1849, Hungary was once more reconciled to its ruling house and made a settlement with Austria, and that after the star of the House of Habsburg had begun to wane, through losing so much in the Italian and Russian wars. And ingratitude was once more the reward of our nation.

For, faithfully as Hungary has adhered to the settlement, it has always had much to suffer, since Austria, with the help of her rulers, has not only always suppressed the political equality of Hungary in regard to other countries, but also prevented the

economic development of the land in every respect. A country which has suffered so much for four hundred years, is obliged to forth the greatest efforts to avoid such a disadvantageous lot, and it is a proof of the will and primitive strength of the people in struggling through this, that it has awakened from its apathy and has progressed on the path of economic and cultural development. That it has not yet attained that level which other peoples have been able to reach by peaceful development can scarcely serve as a pretext for its being overthrown and crushed. For that alone is the intention of our enemies, who wish to rob us of the greater part of our country.

IV. WHAT WOULD BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF A PARTITION OF THE COUNTRY?

Should the Peace Conference lead to the result of Hungary being divided, it would have the most serious consequences, economic as well as political.

One need not go into the details of the economic results of this misfortune. Everyone can perceive that the country must be economically ruined, since its coal, its metals, its water and other natural forces, its forests and its outlet to the world would be taken away. And that is what it would signify if Upper Hungary should fall to the Czechs, Transsylvania and East Hungary to the Rumanians, the most fruitful part of South Hungary to the Serbs, and

West Hungary perhaps to the Croats, perhaps to German-Austria and by Fiume, the only sea-port, falling to the South-Slavs or the Italians, the open way to the sea could be closed at any moment by alien States. The Hungarian people will defend itself against their fate with all the courage of despair, and should this fate be unavoidable, it will nurse an as yet unknown sentiment of unquenchable hate.

For no Hungarian will ever forget with what treachery the Czechs acted in the Great War, how many hundreds of thousands of Hungarian lives have been sacrificed to it, — then all the sins of the Rumanian and Serb assassins will be handed down in living memory to later generations and the Hungarian people will also recollect that it was the Western Powers who brought this shame upon them. Then nobody can wonder if the Hungarians seize any possible opportunity of setting the world on fire and the whole responsibility will fall upon those who unwisely assisted those peoples to power whose only service in the war was breach of faith, treachery, and assassination. It can be no peace which must lead to such terrible events and if a real peace of the nations is to come to pass some calm deliberation is necessary. Not we are to blame, that fate has forced us into the camp hostile to the Western Powers. There is nothing for us to atone for. On the contrary, the Western Powers are always *our* debtors, in that they have been protected from the horrors of war for centuries.

Therefore we Hungarian reckon with confidence that the peace will secure to us not only the most complete integrity of our country, but also the possession of a free outlet, not only to the Adriatic, but also to the Black Sea, and that in our peaceful work for civilisation we can forget and forgive all the injuries done against us by our neighbours.

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authors of Hungarians in the American civil war, ect.

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corresponding member of the Institute of Actuaries.

THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF HUNGARY AND

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LA VÉRITÉ SUR LA HONGRIE ET SUR LA

POLITIQUE MAGYARE par M. PRÖHLE

professeur à l'Université de Debrecen.

L'INTEGRITÉ TERRITORIALE DE LA HONGRIE

AU POINT DE VUE DU CHEMIN DE FER

par CORNEL TOLNAY, ancien secrétaire d'État et directeur général
des Chemins de fer de l'État Hongrois.

STRASSBOURG-METZ

PRESSBOURG-KASSA

par ALEXANDRE PETHŐ.

LA HONGRIE AVANT, PENDANT ET APRÈS

LA GUERRE MONDIALE

par JULES ALTENBURGER.

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